

## Hit The Trail

**W**HILE RHODE ISLAND IS FAMOUS FOR ITS BEACHES, A NEW SUMMER DESTINATION MIGHT HAVE YOU PACKING YOUR SNEAKERS, NOT YOUR FLIP-FLOPS. INSTEAD OF SIMPLY SITTING ON A BEACH, VISIT THE WILLIAM O'NEIL SOUTH COUNTY BIKE PATH TO TAKE IN SOME BEAUTIFUL NATURE SCENERY, AND GET SOME EXERCISE TOO.

The bike path is named after the late State Senator William C. O'Neil, who sponsored the development of the 5.6 mile long path to permit children to travel to school safely by foot or bicycle. Currently, the trail connects the heritage towns of South Kingstown and historic Wakefield village. In the future, it will extend to the picturesque beach town of Narragansett. It is just one of 6 major bike paths in RI which total 51.2 miles in length, supplemented by 90 miles of on-road bike routes. Quite impressive considering the state is only 37 miles wide and 48 miles long!

The bike paths fall under the stewardship of Rhode Island's Department of Transportation (RIDOT). When you first tread a foot or crank a pedal on this path, you'll fully appreciate the quality of work that the RIDOT, in conjunction with Friends of the South County Bike Path (a volunteer organization), have achieved. RIDOT spokesman Charles St. Martin said "RIDOT is extremely proud of the William C. O'Neill Bike Path and is pleased to continue working with the Town of Narragansett to extend the Bike Path into its town,"

The path begins at the Kingston Station, a splendid railroad facility in West Kingston originally built in 1875. Though damaged by fire in 1988, the station was beautifully restored and rededicated ten years later. The station also serves RI's public transportation service (RIPTA), whose buses are all equipped with bike racks. This location makes the path accessible by train, bus or car- with or without beach chairs! The parking lot at the station offers free parking and is private enough to make a change of clothing in your car, before or after exercise.

As you lace up your running shoes, strap on your roller-blades or check the tire pressure on your bike, you may have the exciting opportunity to watch the Amtrak



Acela Express fly through Kingston Station as it speeds from Providence to Manhattan en-route to Washington DC.

During the winter months, the Narragansett Running Association uses the path for their training runs. The path is not lit, so the runners are forced to provide their own light. Seeing 30 runners in a pack wearing headlamps in the pitch blackness makes for a quite surreal sight. Once the snow gets deep the path and it becomes the domain of cross-country skiers.

As winter ends and the skis are put into storage, the path becomes a Mecca for birders. The bike path cuts through the wetlands, providing spectacular scenery. On a good spring day an experienced birder can identify upward of 80 birds. The trails winds through the Great Swamp Management Area, a historic location where Puritans from Massachusetts and Connecticut battled a group of Narragansett Native Americans during King Phillip's war in 1675. The swamp



comprises 3,349 acres, of which 2,262 acres are wetlands.

Once you pass through the wetlands, the path meanders through the mill-town of Peacedale and on to the historic Wakefield village, where the course currently ends. In Wakefield, you can stop to enjoy the quaint village, have a gourmet coffee and kick-back while contemplating the first half or your trip. Then, enjoy a smile at the thought of doing it all again. CLM ◆ By George Ross. Imagery courtesy of George Ross.